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Translated by:
Defence Section, Language Branch

Statement of the Navy Dept. of the Imperial
General Headquarters concerning the Panay Incident.

24th December, 12th year of Show
(1937)

Regarding the incident in which our navy airplanes bombed the American river gunboat "Panay" and the vessels of other nations on 12th December, the Navy Dept. of the Imperial General Headquarters published an interim general outline report. The following facts have been made clear since then, and the Vice Minister of the Navy at six o'clock yesterday, i.e. Dec. 23rd, explained the real circumstances of that incident to the American Ambassador to Japan.

1. Circumstances up till the occurrence of the incident. Since the outbreak of the present Sino-Japanese Incident the Japanese Navy has made every effort to protect the interests and lives of third powers, and, especially in the case of attacking ships. We have made the utmost effort not to attack ships except Chinese war vessels or her ships directly contributing to military operations. But China has frequently disguised her forces by flying flags of third powers or using their rights and privileges for her military operations and this has frequently occasioned us great disadvantage. For instance on 27th December, on the occasion of attacking Chingiang, our Navy air corps, discovering a large Chinese force retreating on board ships, immediately started to attack them, but the enemy instantly swarmed around third powers merchant ships, so

our planes were finally obliged to give up the attack.

In view of the situation mentioned above, on 9th, December the Japanese Consul-General in Shanghai made a representation to the consuls-general of other powers to the effect that, under the present situation when the battle is beginning to rage along the whole coast of the Yangtze River, although the Japanese army, of course, would do its best to protect the third powers interests, the other powers also, for their part, were requested to cooperate in their efforts to set their vessels and vehicles apart from the Chinese army forces or Chinese military equipment, and if possible, to withdraw from fighting areas completely.

The American gunboat "Panay" was lying at anchor two miles up the river from Nanking but, as the battle in that district was getting serious she was gradually moving to the upper reaches of the river, protecting three American merchant ships. On the day of the occurrence of the incident, she was taking refuge at a place 26 miles up the river from Nanking, taking steps to inform the Japanese authorities of her position. Although we recognize that it was in conformity with our above mentioned notice, unfortunately her last refuge position also was involved in the midst of a zone in which our forces and the enemy were exchanging fire. To make the matter worse, the information of the last position of refuge was delayed as will be referred to later. It can not be regretted too much that the

11F 100 195
efforts of the captain of the Panay could not previously prevent the occurrence of that incident.

II. The Information received by the Commander of the Navy Air unit.

The commander of the navy air unit assigned since the 11th with the task of cooperating with army operations, had received the information that the Chinese soldiers in the Nanking area were retreating toward the upper part of the river on board ships and that the ships were going back and forth between Nanking and that part. But at noon (Tokyo time henceforth the same) on the 12th receiving the news that ships of various sizes together with many junks were going up the river between 12 and 25 miles from Nanking, loaded with the retreating enemies, he instantly gave order to annihilate these ships. But unfortunately the information from the American consul-general in Shanghai that the Panay and three American merchant ships were staying about 27 miles up the river from Nanking reached the Headquarters of the Japanese Fleet in China at 5 P.M. through the consul-general and it was not until 5.30 P.M. that the news was received by the commander of the air unit. Therefore the above-mentioned air unit know nothing at all about the fact that American ships were about 27 miles up the river from Nanking, it was owing to unavoidable circumstances that they mistook the ships in that area for Chinese ones.

III. The Circumstances of Bombing.

The bombing by our navy air unit was carried out by from two to six planes at a time, repeated six times in all, from 2.25 P.M. to 5.30 P.M. The four ships all got bombed and two

(including the American gunboat "Panay") of them were finally sunk. The strafing fire of the machine-gun of the plane was made only once by one of them in the second bombing and that for a short time.

The aviators of the planes know nothing at all about the fact that American vessels were lying at anchor in that area, and they ^{were} carried away by the desire to co-operate with the friendly forces attacking the enemy capital at Nanking, and encouraged at the news that there were ships loaded with retreating forces of the enemy, left base for the front in high spirits. Moreover the bad visibility on the river from the upper air due to smoke and mist which, in consequence of fires breaking out there about at that time, covered the Yangtze River near Kaiyuan Wharf where the Panay was lying at anchor, together with their preoccupation mentioned above, made the air unit unable to distinguish the American ships from others which resulted in their bombing them. The aviators, perceiving many Chinese taking refuge from these merchant ships by landing ashore mistook them for Chinese soldiers, and, at last, did harm even to the officers and men on board the army motor-boat, which were then rescuing the American sufferers on the spot.

IV. The Circumstances Surrounding the Rescue of the Sufferers.

The commander of the Japanese Fleet in China received information from the Commander of the American Asiatic Fleet at 9 a.m. on 13th December, that the communication with the Panay

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had been interrupted since the afternoon of the 12th. After investigation, we came, at last, to find out the fact that the ships which we had attacked with the firm belief that they were Chinese ones were in reality American ships, so we resolved to make our utmost efforts to relieve the sufferers. We at once dispatched the HOZU with a rescue flying-boat, and, by means of wireless telegraphs and leaflets, informed our army forces stationed thereabout of the outline of the incident and that the sufferers were staying in Hohsieu, and asked them to relieve these sufferers.

Due to the interference with our relief activities by Chinese soldiers ashore, the work of picking up the coroses of the captain and a member of the crew on board one of the American ships which had run ashore on the left bank of the Yangtze River was prolonged till the 15th. We at last succeeded in picking them up aboard HOZU, suppressing the enemy by bombardment from our war vessels. The fact that the Chinese soldiers were firing violently from the banks of the river without distinguishing Anglo-Americans from Japanese can not be ignored in the investigation of this incident. In brief, the Panay incident happened in a district of fierce and complicated fightings between the forces of the two Powers and it had relation to both the navy and the army, and was caused partly by the bad conditions of communications. It took a long time to investigate the matter and we are very sorry that some foreign nations, in the

112-400-h 195

meantime, misunderstood the real facts or made distorted reports and, to make the matter worse, amongst them were nations that, on purpose, made bad propaganda so as to trap Japan. We firmly believe that you will recognize, judging from the real circumstances of the case already mentioned above, that this unhappy incident was entirely due to a mistake and was not a premeditated action based upon our malice.

「バネー」號事件大本營海軍部公表

(昭和十二年十一月二十四日)

十二月十二日我海軍飛行機カ米國河用砲艦「バネー」及ヒ各國船舶ヲ
爆撃セル事件ニ關シテハ藝ニ不取敢大本營海軍部ヨリ其ノ概要ヲ發表
セルカ其ノ後判明セル事實左ノ通ニシテ昨十二月二十三日午後六時海
軍次官ヨリ駐日米國大使ニ對シ右事實ノ眞相ヲ説明セリ。

「事件發生ニ至ル迄ノ事情

今次事變勃發以來帝國海軍ハ第三國ノ權益並ニ人命保護ニ對シ有ユル
勢力ヲ致シ殊ニ艦船ニ對スル攻撃ニ際シテハ支那艦艇及直接作駁行動
ニ關係セル支那船舶以外絕對ニ攻撃セサル如ク爲シ來レル處支那ハ屢
第三國ノ國旗ヲ詐用シ或ハ第三國利益ヲ作取ニ利用スル等ノコトアリ
タル爲我宣戰行動ニ至大ノ不利ヲ蒙リタルコト少ナカラス現ニ十一月
二十七日鎮江攻撃ノ際支那兵大部鹹カ船舟ニ塔乗シテ退却シツツアル
ヲ發見シタル我海軍航空隊ハ直ニコレカ攻撃ニ向ヒタルニ敵ハ忽チ附
近ニ碇泊セシ第三國商船周囲ニ靖樂シタルタメ遂ニコレカ攻撃ヲ中止

スルニ至リタル如キハソノ一例ナリ。

右ノ如キ事情ニ鑑ミ十二月九日上海在勤帝國總領事ハ各國總領事ニ對シ戰鬪カ揚子江沿岸全部ニ渡反シツツアル情況ニ於テ日本軍ハ勿論第三國權益保護ニハ最善ヲ盡スヘキモ第三國モ亦我方ノ努力ニ協力シ其ノ船舶車輛ヲ支那軍及ヒ支那軍事施設ヨリ離隔セシメ、出來得ヘクンハ戰鬪地域ヨリ完全ニ離脱センコトヲ希望スル旨申入レタリ。

米艦「バネー」ハ十二月十日南京上流二浬ニ碇泊セシカ同方面戰鬪激烈トナルヤ米國商船三隻ヲ保護シツツ漸次上流ニ移轉シ事件發生當日ニ於テハ南京上流二十六浬附近ニ避難シ且其ノ位置ヲ我方ニ通告スルノ手續ヲ執レリ、右ハ前記我方通告ノ趣旨ニ添ヘルモノト認メラルモ不幸ニシテ右最終避難位置モ亦彼我勢力錯綜ノ中心トナリ且ソノ最終避難位置通知モ後段述フル如キ事情ニ依リ通達遲延シ結局「バネー」號艦長ノ努力モ本事件ヲ未然ニ防止シ得サリシハ返ス返スモ遺憾トスルトコロナリ。・

二海軍航空部隊指揮官方參受セル情報

陸軍ノ作戦ニ協力スヘキ任務ヲ課セラレタル海軍航空部隊指揮官ハ十
 一日以來「南京方面ノ支那兵力船舶ニ依リ上流方面ニ逃走シツツアリ」
 又「此等船舶ハ屢南京ト其ノ上流トノ間ヲ往復シツツアリ」等ノ情報
 ヲ受領シ居タル處、十二日正午ヘ東京時間以下同様「大小汽船十隻
 及ヒ戎克多數ハ敵退却兵ヲ塔載シ南京上流十二浬乃至二十五浬附近ヲ
 潟江中」トノ情報ヲ得ルニ及ヒ直ニ該船舶ヲ撃滅スヘキ旨下令セルカ
 同日「バネー」及ヒ米國商船三隻カ南京上流二十七浬附近ニ在リトノ
 通知ハ上海米國總領事ヨリ帝國總領事ヲ經テ午後五時我支那方面艦隊
 司令部ニ到着シ之カ航空部隊指揮官ニ通達セルハ午後五時三十分以後
 ナリキ、從テ右航空部隊ハ南京上流二十七浬附近ニ米國艦船アル如キ
 ハ全然知ル所ナカリシ爲該方面ニ在リタル之等艦船ヲ支那船舶ナリト
 確信スルニ至リシハ蓋シ已ムヲ得ザル次第ナリ。

三 爆擊ノ情況

我海軍航空隊ノ爆擊ハ午後二時二十五分ヨリ同五時三十分ノ間ニ於テ
 前後六回、毎回二機乃至六機ノ飛行機ヲ以テ行ハレ四隻ノ艦船ニ悉ク

命中シ二隻一米國河用砲艦「バネー」ヲ含ム一ヲ沈没セシムルニ至ラシメタリ、尙飛行機ニヨル機銃掃射ハ第二回爆撃機中ノ一機ヨリ短時間行ヒタルノミナリ。

右攻撃ニ参加セル飛行機塔架員ハ敵方面ニ米國艦船在泊セル事實ハ何等知ルトコロナク敵首都南京攻略中ノ友軍ニ協力セントノ感激ニ驅ラレ「敵退却部隊ノ塔架セル船舶アリ」トノ情報ヲ得テ勇闘發進セルモノナリ加之當時附近各所ノ火災ノ影響ヲ受ケ「バネー」在泊セル開源碼頭附近揚子江上ハ煙霧ノ爲上空ヨリ視認情況不良ナリシト前記ノ如キ先入主ト相俟チテ遂ニ米國艦船タルコトヲ識別スルコト能ハスシテ之ヲ爆撃スルニ至リ更ニ此等商船ヨリ多數ノ支那人ガ上陸避退スルヲ認メタル飛行機塔架員ハ之ヲ支那兵ト誤認シ遂ニ當時現場附近ニ於被害米人ヲ救護中ナリシ我陸軍發動艇駆組ノ將兵ニ迄モ危害ヲ及ホスニ至レリ。

四 遺難者救助ニ關スル事情

十二月十三日午前九時米國東洋艦隊司令長官ヨリ我支那方面艦隊司令

長官ニ十二日午後以來「バネー」トノ通信遮絶セル旨ノ通告ニ接シ調査ノ結果、茲ニ初メテ前日支那船ト確信シテ攻撃センヘ米國艦船ナルコト判明スルニ至リ遭難者救助ニ全力ヲ盡スニ決シ、直ニ保津ヲ現場ニ溯江セシムルト共ニ救助用飛行艇ヲ派遣シ且無線電信及ヒ「ビラ」ヲ以テ事件ノ概要ト遭難者カ和縣ニ在ル旨ヲ通知シ現地附近陸軍部隊ニ救護ヲ依頼セリ。

尙當時陸上ニアリシ支那兵力遭難者救助作業ヲ妨害スルコト甚シク揚子江左岸ニ擋坐セル米船一隻ノ船長外一名ノ死體收容モ之カタメ遷延シ十五日ニ至リ、我艦艇ノ砲撃ニヨリ敵ヲ制壓シツツ漸ク保津ニ收容スルニ成功セル次第ニシテ支那兵力江岸ヨリ英米人及ヒ日本人ノ見境ナク盛ニ射撃セルノ事實ハ本事件審査上見遁スヘカラサル事項ナリ。之ヲ要スルニ今次「バネー」號事件ハ彼我勢力錯綜セル激戦地域ニ於テ生起シ而モ海陸軍ニ關係アリ通信連絡意ノ如クナラサル等ニモ基因シ、調査ニ時日ヲ費シ此ノ間諸外國ニ於テ事實ヲ誤解又ハ歪曲報道セラレ中ニハ故意ニ帝國ヲ陷レントスルカ如キ惡宣傳行ハルルニ至リタ

ルハ甚々遺憾トスル所ニシテコノ不幸ナル出來事力全然錯認ニ基クモ
ノニシテ我方ノ故意或ハ惡意ニ基ク計畫的行爲ニ非ラサルコトハ前記
諸項ノ如キ事實ノ真相ニヨリ自ラ諒解セラルヘキヲ信シテ疑ハス

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C E R T I F I C A T E

Statement of Source and Authenticity

I, Hayashi, Kaoru, Chief of the Archives Section, Japanese Foreign Office, hereby certify that the document hereto attached in Japanese consisting of 7 pages and entitled "Statement of the Navy Department of the Imperial General Headquarters concerning the Panay Incident, December 24, 1937." is an exact and true copy of an official document of the Japanese Foreign Office.

Certified at Tokyo.

on this 5th day of December 1946.

K. Hayashi
Signature of Official

Witness: Nagaharu Odo

TRANSLATION CERTIFICATE

I, William E. Clarke, of the Defense Language Branch, hereby certify that the foregoing translation described in the above certificate is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, a correct translation and is as near as possible to the meaning of the original document.

/s/ William E. Clarke

Tokyo, Japan

Date: 17 January 1947